

CHAPTER VII UNDER A DARKENING SKY

"Then In her sacred saving hands
She took the sorrows of the
lands, With maiden palms she
lifted up The sick time's blood-
embittered cup, And in her virgin
garment furl'd The faint limbs of
a wounded world Clothed with
calm love and clear desire, She
went forth in her soul's attire, A
missive fire."

A. C. Swinburne, *Songs before
Sunrftt,*

CATHERINE was by this time no longer at Siena. Other cities in Tuscany were now claiming her spiritual ministrations, and her great political work had fairly begun.

It was probably in the latter part of 1374 that Birgitta's confessor, the hermit-bishop, Alfonso da Vadaterra, returned to Italy from Avignon. He came to Siena, and sought an interview with Catherine in the name of the Pope, from whom he brought her the apostolic benediction, to enlist her ever-increasing spiritual influence for the papal intentions. ⁽¹⁾ "The Pope," writes Catherine to Fra Bartolommeo and Fra Tommaso Caffarini, who were then at Pisa, "has sent here one of his vicars—the spiritual father of that Countess who died at Rome. It is he who renounced the bishopric for love of virtue, and he came to me in the name of the Holy Father, bidding me offer up special prayers for him and for Holy Church ; and for a sign he brought me the holy indulgence. Rejoice then and be glad, for the Holy Father has begun to attend to the honour of God and of Holy Church. I have written a letter to the Holy Father, beseeching him, for the love of that most sweet blood, to give us leave to expose our bodies to every torment. Pray to the supreme eternal Truth that, if it is best, He may vouchsafe this mercy to us and to you, so that we may all together give our lives for Him." * To Alfonso

¹ Letter 127 (117). Cf. Cristofano di Gano, *Memorie*, p. 34. This letter about the Crusade, which was apparently Catherine's first to Gregory XI, has not come down to us.